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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Written statement* submitted by the World Organization against Torture, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[14 January 2000]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization.

GE.00-11004 (E)

The adoption on 10 December 1998 of a Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was a definite sign of progress and provides references and criteria which States should take into account in matters relating to human rights and in particular to human rights defenders.

While we welcome this Declaration as a significant step forward, we regret to note that no institutional monitoring mechanism has been established. Forum 98 has therefore taken the initiative of bridging this gap to the extent that it is able.

Forum 98, a coalition of NGOs, most of them with special consultative status, organized a major international meeting on the protection of human rights defenders, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. By the end of the conference - which had received substantial support from the Swiss Confederation - Forum 98 and all the delegates (more than 250) had drawn up a programme of action (see annex).

One of our concerns and hopes was that the Commission would appoint a special rapporteur on the question of human rights defenders. As this goal has not yet been achieved, Forum 98 decided to prepare a report on how States in the various regions of the world are or are not implementing the principles contained in the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

A significant number of NGOs around the world are therefore being asked about local situations and the conditions in which NGOs have to work. Their replies will be compiled and presented as a report to the next session of the Commission on Human Rights.

We wish, therefore, to inform you of this project, which is of great importance to all human rights organizations.

On behalf of the member organizations of Forum 98
Eric Sottas, Chair, Director, OMCT

Geneva, 16 December 1999.